

VIRGINIA CREEPER

Parthenocissus quinquefolia

(L.) Planch.

Plant Symbol = PAQU2

Contributed by: USDA NRCS National Plant Data Center



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Warning: Virginia creeper berries are highly toxic to humans and may be fatal if eaten. Its sap can also cause skin irritation in some people.

Alternate Names

Woodbind, woodbine, false grapes, five leaves, American Ivy, five leaved Ivy, thicket creeper

Uses

Wildlife: The berries of this plant are eaten by many animals especially birds. Animals such as mice, skunks, chipmunks, squirrels, cattle and deer will munch on the leaves and stems. This plant provides great cover for small animals because of its thick foliage. The vines provide birds with perches, nesting places and leaf surfaces to find food.

Erosion Control: Virginia creeper is used as a ground cover to control soil erosion in shaded areas and on slopes.

Medicinal: The bark has been used in domestic medicine as a tonic, expectorant, and remedy. The berries have been found serviceable in rheumatic complaints and are found to help cure

dropsy. The roots are used for diarrhea and the bark and twigs are made into cough syrup.

Ornamental: It is often cultivated as an ornamental because of its fall foliage and to replace many exotic plants. It is an excellent covering for walls, trellises, arbors or fences. It may also be grown on the ground to cover old stumps, rock piles and other "eyesores".

Description

Vine Family (Vitaceae). Virginia creeper is a native, fast-growing, perennial, woody vine that may climb or trail along the ground. The leaves are compound, containing five leaflets. Leaflets range in size from 2-6 inches and have toothed margins. The leaflets are red when they first emerge but turn green as they mature. In the fall, leaves turn a bright red to maroon color. The inconspicuous green color flowers are borne in small clusters during the spring and followed by small clusters of fruit in early summer. This fruit is a 4 to 6 mm diameter bluish-black berry that usually contains two to three seeds. The vines adhere to surfaces by means of five to eight branched tendrils ending in cup-like adhesive tips. New stems are brownish-green and finely hairy but gradually acquire pale, raised dots and turn purplish-brown with age.

Virginia creeper is often confused with eastern poison ivy (*Toxicodendron radicans*), however; a clear distinction between the species is that eastern poison ivy has three leaflets and Virginia creeper has five leaflets. The PLANTS Web site at plants.usda.gov contains an image of eastern poison ivy.

Reproduction: Virginia creeper flowers from June to August, matures fruits from August to October and drops fruits from September to February. The seeds are dispersed by birds. The seeds usually germinate the first or second spring after dispersal.

Adaptation and Distribution

Virginia creeper is found throughout the southern, midwestern and eastern half of the United States. The plant is also native to northern Mexico and southeastern Canada from Nova Scotia to Ontario. Virginia creeper can be found in new and old forests and forest margins. It can also be found on the borders of clearings, on trees, along fencerows and streambanks. The plant thrives in partial shade to full sun. It prefers acidic soil, and tolerates a wide range

of soils from dry sandy soils to moist loamy soils. The plant is also salt tolerant. The species is cultivated as an ornamental in many moist temperate areas of the world.

For current distribution, please consult the Plant Profile page for this species on the PLANTS Web site.

Establishment

Seeds can be sown in the fall or in the spring after cold-moist stratification. Seeds should be drilled 3/8 inches deep in soil or mulch. Optimum planting is 10 plants per square foot. Virginia creeper can also be propagated from hardwood cuttings or layering.

Management

Once Virginia creeper is well established, it grows quickly. It must often be pruned to prevent it from getting out of control. The species can handle periods of sparse rain fairly well; however, if a drought persists, water the vine every week soaking the soil at least six inches. Virginia creeper can be a rampant grower with a climbing height of over 60 feet and a spread of over 50 feet.

Pests and Potential Problems

No pests or diseases are of major concern, but mildews, leaf spots, canker and wilt are occasional problems. Virginia creeper is sometimes bothered by beetles, scale, leaf hoppers, caterpillars and other leaf eating insects. These pests cause the leaves to be ragged and tattered.

Some literature suggests that Virginia Creeper is not poisonous, but the sap of the plant contains oxalate crystals and can cause skin irritation and rashes in some people.

Ornamental: If you grow Virginia creeper on walls, make sure you want it as a permanent fixture. Once it is established, it is very difficult to remove. You could damage the wall trying to remove the species.

Environmental Concerns

Virginia creeper will grow up any tree and most shrubs. This species will slowly kill the host on which it is growing, because it prevents the host from receiving an adequate amount of sunlight. It can also crowd or choke other plants.

Control

Please contact your local agricultural extension specialist, or county weed specialist to learn what works best in your area. If chemicals are

recommended be sure to read the label and follow all application and safety instructions for each control method. Trade names and control measures appear in this document only to provide specific information. USDA NRCS does not guarantee or warranty the products and control methods named, and other products may be equally effective. Below is an internet site that contains control information for Virginia creeper:

North Carolina State University

<http://ipm.ncsu.edu/apple/orchardguide/Herbicides.pdf>

Cultivars, Improved, and Selected Materials (and area of origin)

The commercial nursery trade has developed three Virginia creeper cultivars:

‘Engelmanii’-This has smaller leaves and better clinging characteristics than the species general population.

‘Monham’-The leaves have white variegations.

‘Variegata’-It is less vigorous than the species’ general population, but the leaves are marked with yellow and white then develop a pink and red color in the fall.

Contact your local Natural Resources Conservation Service (formerly Soil Conservation Service) office for more information. Look in the phone book under “United States Government.” The Natural Resources Conservation Service will be listed under the subheading “Department of Agriculture.”

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